Missing persons' fate unclear despite years of protest: VBMP

Use of force can't bring peace to Balochistan, Nasrullah Baloch warns

By Muhammad Akbar Notezai

QUETTA: The Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP) has said that despite 16 years of protests, sit-ins and rallies, the issue of enforced disappearances of political workers, students and other residents of Balochistan remains unresolved.

Speaking at a press conference on Sunday, VBMP Chairman Nasrullah Baloch urged the state and its institutions to realise that the use of force, extrajudicial killings and disappearances of Baloch citizens would not improve the situation in the province.

Instead, he called for a serious political approach to address Balochistan's long-standing grievances.

Flanked by family members of the missing, including VBMP General Secretary Hooran Baloch and activist Ghani Baloch, he said the organisation's protest camp outside the Quetta Press Club had now completed 6,000 days.

"This camp has also been set up in various parts of Balochistan, as well as in Karachi and Islamabad. It is viewed across Pakistan and the world as a symbol of peaceful resistance," he said.

He said that over the past 16 years, the organisation had held protests, seminars and long marches from Quetta to Islamabad, both on foot and by train.

Nasrullah Baloch said the VBMP had registered cases of enforced disappearances with the judiciary, inquiry commissions and the federal and provincial governments, and had presented evidence to the relevant authorities despite "serious difficulties and hardships".

"False cases under the Anti-Terrorism Act were filed against me, General Secretary Hooran Baloch, Vice Chairman Mama Qadeer Baloch and others. We faced arrests and torture, but we did not abandon our struggle," Nasrullah Baloch said.

He claimed that two VBMP district coordinators were extrajudicially killed during the movement, yet the campaign continued.

Families of missing persons, he said, submit complete details of their loved ones to the VBMP, which then forwards the cases to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances and to the provincial government.

"The commission initiates legal proceedings within a week and issues notices to the relevant institutions. We also guide victims' families about legal requirements," he said.

Drawing on years of experience, he urged the state to understand that peace in Balochistan could not be restored through force.

"Thousands of Baloch have been forcibly disappeared and thousands have been killed extrajudicially, yet the situation continues to deteriorate. We appeal to the state to refrain from using force in Balochistan. The issue is political and must be resolved through political dialogue," he stressed.

He also demanded that all citizens be treated in accordance with the law, that missing persons be recovered, that those facing charges be produced before courts and that extrajudicial arrests and killings be stopped.

He called for legislation "in line with human dignity and constitutional principles" to address enforced disappearances.

Nasrullah Baloch also urged the families of missing persons not to remain silent. "Come forward with complete details of your loved ones," he appealed.

Haq to be unseated, Rathore installed in AJK today

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that it would back the no-confidence motion but would not take any share in a PPP-led government Consequently, the party's two senior AJK leaders Shah Ghulam Qadir and Raja Farooq Haider signed the resolution along with the 23 PPP legislators.

On the other hand, the five-member PTI, which currently holds the office of Leader of the Opposition, as well as the two single-seat parties — Muslim Conference and Jammu Kashmir Peoples Party (JKPP) — have announced that they will stay away from the process.

On Sunday, two more PTI 'forward-bloc' lawmakers — Minister for Elementary Education Deewan Ali Chughtai and Minister for Small Industries Corporation Taqdees Kausar Gillani — announced their decision to join the PPP after meeting Faryal Talpur, raising its own support base to 29. "We will get the no-confidence motion through with a wide margin," said Chaudhry Qasim Majeed, a senior PPP figure and cabinet member in the Haq-led coalition government. "The PML-N will also support us in this regard," he added.

It was, however, yet to be seen whether the movers of the no-trust motion, who have accused Mr Haq of causing "serious damage to the constitutional, ideological and democratic framework of the state through his governance style, political narrative and confrontational conduct", would defend their position through speeches in Monday's session.

Ironically, neither had any of the movers stepped down on their own, nor had Mr Haq mustered the courage to remove them in response to their allegations.

Referring to these accusations in an interview with a private TV channel, Mr Haq termed them "childish" and "frivolous", adding that those who drafted them did not themselves appear to understand what they had written.

"The charge sheet against me leaves one wondering whether the allegations were even understood before being made. If my cabinet colleagues had difficulty writing in Urdu, they could have asked me; I would have drafted the accusations against myself in better words," he remarked.

Mr Haq claimed he had broken the "status quo" and ensured cabinet involvement in all decisions.

Responding strongly to the allegation of "confrontational conduct" in the no-confidence text, the embattled prime minister asserted that his speeches, videos and public statements over the past two and a half years were on record, and that a disruptive mindset did not — and could not — exist in him. "The person who wrote this phrase should at least know what he was writing," he said.

Under the AJK Constitution, a vote of no confidence against the sitting prime minister automatically counts as a vote in favour of the lawmaker proposed as his successor in the same resolution. Once the motion succeeds, Mr Rathore will stand elected as the new prime minister, fourth in the sitting assembly since its installation in 2021.

Mr Majeed said the new premier was likely to take the oath of office on Tuesday before President Barrister Sultan Mahmood.

PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari is also expected to attend the swearing-in ceremony, among other dignitaries, he added.

'State must ensure women get inheritance rights'

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lawful entitlements.

"Furthermore, those who, through coercion, deceit, or undue influence, deprive women of this divinely bestowed right must be held accountable under the law and made answerable," Justice Minallah stressed.

The judgement also referred to the Federal Shariat Court's (FSC) landmark ruling in March this year, wherein it declared that any custom — such as of 'Chaddar', 'Parchi' or 'Haq Bakhshwai' — that deprived women of inheritance right was "un-Islamic" and had no legal standing whatsoever.

The SC judgement observed that the right to inheritance was "not a concession granted by human law but a divinely ordained command, explicitly declared in the Holy Quran". "Any denial or obstruction of this right is, therefore, not merely unlawful but a transgression against Divine Will," it stated.

The ruling, echoing the FSC's verdict, emphasised that "cultural or societal practices that deprive women of their rightful inheritance are rooted neither in faith nor in justice".

It termed such customs "remnants of ignorance which the message of Islam came to abolish", and noted that the state bore a "sacred constitutional duty to uproot such practices".

"A society that turns a blind eye to deprivation of inheritance rights to its women defies the spirit of Constitution and Command of Almighty Allah," the ruling stated. "A state that fails to safeguard the inheritance rights to its women fails in its duty to uphold the principles of equity, faith and justice."

The SC in its short order had imposed a cost of Rs500,000 on Hussain, which was to deposited with the SC registrar within seven days. "It is directed that the amount so deposited shall be distributed amongst the legal heirs declared by the trial court," the SC judgment reiterated.

Maiden session of 11th NFC delayed

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in each NFC award cannot be reduced. The NFC award has to be achieved with consensus of five parties — the Centre and the four provinces.

Under the 7th NFC award, the four provinces are collectively entitled to 57.5pc of divisible pool taxes, besides the revenue from income tax, wealth tax, capital value tax, general sales tax, customs duties and federal excise.

The provincial governments receive their horizontal shares on the basis of population, poverty, revenue collection, and inverse population density.

This allows Punjab to obtain a share of 51.74pc, Sindh 24.55pc, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 14.62pc, and Balochistan 9.09pc.

Political bargain

The sources said the provinces had been conveyed the date of Nov 18 for the inaugural meeting early this month, although without issuing a formal notification.

They added that the Prime Minister's Office called for postponing the meeting and for not communicating a new date to the provinces before the premier could take up the matter with the coalition partners.

The prime minister has officially no role in the NFC engagements after the commission is constituted by the president.

The revision in the NFC parameters was originally part of the proposed 27th Constitutional Amendment as the Centre wanted to reduce the financial shares of the provinces and take back some of the devolved subjects like education, population, etc.

However, the federal government stepped back in a political bargain with its main coalition partner, the PPP, for amendments relating to the armed forces and the judiciary.

Nevertheless, the prime minister has been hinting at continuing dialogue with the PPP for the NFC.

While the Centre had already crafted a major revenue source — petroleum development levy (PDL) on various products instead of the NFC –it has also secured about Rs1.5tr cashback from the provinces outside the award.

Revenue sources outside NFC

The combined impact of the two — PDL and provincial cash surplus — work out to be around Rs3 trillion for the current fiscal year — almost 2pc of the GDP.

On top of this, the Centre has secured Rs2.5 billion each for the current and last fiscal years on account of State Bank of Pakistan's profits as a consequence of record-high interest rates.

The provincial cash surplus could be impacted by the shortfall in Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) tax collection, which has already amounted to Rs275bn in the first four months and is likely to grow as the year progresses amid lower than the budgeted economic growth rate.

The GDP growth rate has a direct bearing on the FBR's tax collection and as a consequence on the NFC shares of the provinces and then their commitments to provide cash surplus to the Centre under the National Financial Pact orchestrated outside the Constitution under the dictats of the IMF to ensure healthy finances to the federation.

The lower GDP growth could, however, be partly compensated by higher inflation that generate greater sales tax receipts.

Flood devastation

Recently, the finance ministry told the National Assembly that a report compiled by the planning ministry based on data available as of Sept 30 showed that flood "devastation has led to a projected reduction in FY2026 GDP growth by 0.3-0.7pc, lowering the growth outlook from 4.2pc to a range of 3.5-3.9pc".

The planning ministry had estimated economic loss of Rs822bn, equivalent to approximately $2.9bn, it said.

The finance ministry said the floods had exerted upward pressure on inflation.

In the first two months of FY2026 — July and August — inflation remained at 4.1pc and 3pc, respectively; however, in September, it surged to 5.6pc, mainly driven by higher food prices, it added.

The agriculture sector, with damages of Rs430bn (crops losses at Rs422.7bn), alongside significant infrastructure losses of Rs307bn (road infrastructure losses at Rs187.8bn), have been a primary driver of this downturn, the finance ministry said, adding that "due to the crops damages, the growth of agriculture sector is projected at 3pc-3.8pc against the target of 4.5pc.

The finance ministry further said the annual targets for key macroeconomic variables were approved by the National Economic Council.

"These targets remain intact; however, internal assessments are carried out to evaluate the impacts of changing domestic and external conditions," it added.

"Amid the recent floods, considering the estimated economic loss of Rs822bn, the overall GDP growth is projected to decline for FY2025- 26 based on lower growth in agriculture due to extensive crop damages while growth in industry and services may also suffer due to linkages with agriculture."

Moreover, it warned that the rice exports could also suffer while imports of raw cotton, wheat, pulses, and construction materials could increase, thereby widening the trade deficit and straining foreign exchange reserves.

However, higher expected workers' remittances might offset the adverse impact of floods and keeping the current account deficit in check.Likewise, there is a risk of inflationary pressures, particularly on food and essential items, due to crop losses, supply chain disruptions, and higher input costs.

'More amendments'

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pointed to the 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments as significant legislative actions that he said brought "much-needed stability to Pakistan".

"If further constitutional amendments were required, the government, along with its coalition partners, would proceed responsibly, ensuring the dignity of parliament is preserved," Mr Chaudhry affirmed.

The press conference was held at the Astana Aaliya Muhaddis-i-Azam Pakistan Sunni Rizvi Mosque, where the minister received a key endorsement for his brother, Bilal Badar Chaudhary, in the upcoming by-elections.

He thanked Pir Faiz Rasool Rizvi for his support, noting the backing would be crucial in at least five constituencies. He said that religious institutions have historically guided people with "messages of truth, serving as a strong moral force in society".

He assured that security forces and the Election Commission of Pakistan had finalised arrangements for peaceful and transparent elections.

"Any attempt to use violence as a political tool will be met with a firm response," he said. "No one will be allowed to hold democracy or citizens' rights hostage."

Turning his attention to provincial politics, he issued a sharp critique of the PTI-led government in KP. He said the provincial administration had been "clearly informed that it must operate strictly within its constitutional mandate".

In contrast, he lauded the development work in Punjab, governed by his own party, under Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. He highlighted initiatives such as electric buses, water supply projects, road upgrades, solar energy programmes, and the Naya Ghar housing scheme as reasons for increased public support for PML-N candidates.

"These initiatives have also bolstered public appreciation for the policies of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz," he said.

Mr Chaudhry concluded by reiterating the government's core responsibilities. He said PML-N remains committed to the public mandate and rejects "chaos, violence, and negative politics".

He affirmed that the eligibility of the president and prime minister is governed by Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution, ensuring the sanctity of those offices.

The event concluded with a formal announcement of support for the PML-N candidate.—APP

Pilgrims with certain diseases barred from Haj

ISLAMABAD: The Saudi government has imposed a restriction on pilgrims with certain health conditions, including chronic and infectious diseases, from performing Haj next year, according to a notice on the Pakistani religious affairs ministry's website.

The ministry urged doctors to issue health certificates to the pilgrims to avoid legal action, warning that in case of any false and incorrect declarations, they would have to return from Saudi Arabia at their own expense.

Saudi monitoring teams will verify the validity of the pilgrims' fitness certificates at the entry and exit points and locations of Haj to ensure that only those meeting the criteria of participation.—Dawn Report

Jaffar Express escapes bomb attack in Nasirabad

By Ali Jan Mangi

DERA MURAD JAMALI: The Peshawar-bound Jaffar Express escaped a bomb attack near Nutal area of Nasirabad district on Sunday.

Police officials said that miscreants had planted an explosive device on the railway track in the Shaheed Abdul Aziz Bullo area of Rabi Canal, which links Quetta with the rest of the country, to target the Jaffar Express coming from Quetta.

"They detonated the explosive planted on the track. However, fortunately, the train passed the area safely and no human loss was reported," officials said.

A portion of the railway track was damaged in the blast, suspending rail traffic between Quetta and the rest of the country. Railways officials said that the Peshawar-bound Jaffar Express later reached Jacobabad to continue its journey to Peshawar. The Jaffar Express had resumed operations the previous day after a suspension of at least four days.

SSP Nasirabad said that soon after the blast, police and other security forces reached the site and cordoned of the area, and launched an investigation. A search operation has also been initiated to trace the elements involved in the blast.

This was the fourth attempt on the Jaffar Express expressed during the last one-and-a-half months.

Measles-rubella vaccination drive kicks off in Balochistan

QUETTA: A special measles-rubella vaccination campaign is to be conducted across Balochistan from Nov 17 (today) to 29, aiming to vaccinate more than 2.2 million children, Expanded Programme on Immunisation's provincial coordinator Dr Aftab Kakar announced on Sunday.

During a press conference, Dr Kakar highlighted the persistent danger of the disease. "Measles remains a serious health threat in Balochistan, endangering thousands of children every year," he said.

So far in 2025, more than 1,700 cases have been reported in the province, though Dr Kakar noted the actual number is believed to be much higher due to underreporting.

He said that more than 20 children die from measles each year in Balochistan.
—Staff Correspondent

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It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of

Colonel (Retired)

Saleem Ahmad Siddiqui

aged 83 years, a distinguished figure in the field of medical oncology.

Born in 1942, Dr. Siddiqui was a pioneer in his field, being a member of the first batch to receive certification from the American Board of Medical Oncology in 1972. His illustrious career spanned several nations and institutions, leaving an indelible mark on medical practice and education.

Dr. Siddiqui served with distinction in the United States, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia & Upon returning to Pakistan, he continued his dedicated service in Combined Military Hospital and later in Shifa International Hospital. Throughout his career, he was renowned not only for his clinical expertise but also as a great medical educator and teacher, mentoring countless aspiring oncologists.

He got his recertification with distinction, of American Board of Medical Oncology in 2019 at the age of 77 years highlighting his quest for perfection.

A true philanthropist, Dr. Siddiqui dedicated his life to the service of others, particularly cancer patients, whom he continued to treat and care for even on his last day. His compassion and commitment to his patients were extraordinary.

Colonel (Retired) Siddiqui's legacy is one of unwavering dedication, profound knowledge, and selfless service. He will be dearly missed by his family, friends, colleagues, and the countless lives he touched.

Society *of* Medical Oncology Pakistan